

Message Text

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C O N F I S E N T I A L TEHRAN 07700

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, IR
SUBJ: SHAH'S VIEWS ON LIBERALIZATION AND ISFAHAN RIOTS

REF: STATE 204746

BEGIN SUMMARY. ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING WIDE-RANGING CONVERSATION AMONG SHAH, GENERALS HUYSER AND GAST AND ME AT TWO-HOUR AUDIENCE AUGUST 13, SHAH REFERRED TO IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW IN ISFAHAN AND TROUBLE HE WAS HAVING FROM THE EXTREME RIGHT WING OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. HE WAS CLEARLY DISTRESSED BY THE VANDALISM, PARTICULARLY BY TEEN-AGERS. HE AFFIRMED STRONGLY HIS INTENTION TO CONTINUE LIBERALIZATION POLICY AND, AT THE SAME TIME, TO CRACK DOWN HARD ON VANDALS. SHAH LOOKED EXTREMELY FIT. END SUMMARY.

1. SHAH CLEARLY WELCOMED OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS INTERNAL AFFAIRS, ALTHOUGH PURPOSE OF AUDIENCE WAS TO DISCUSS GENERAL HUYSER'S COMMAND AND CONTROL CONCEPT STUDY. HE EMPHASIZED MORE THAN ONCE HIS STRONG DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE THE POLICY OF LIBERALIZATION LOOKING TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC FORM OF GOVERNMENT IN THE FUTURE. IN TERMS SIMILAR TO THOSE THAT HE USED WITH UNDER SECRETARY NEWSOM
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DURING THE LATTER'S AUDIENCE IN JULY, THE SHAH SAID THAT IRAN REALLY HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO OPEN UP ITS GOVERNMENT IN VIEW OF THE VAST ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES AND THE NEED TO PREPARE THE COUNTRY FOR ORDERLY SUCCESSION.

2. BUT, HE SAID, HE WILL NOT PERMIT THE RELIGIOUS "OBSCURANTISTS" TO DESTROY THE NATION BY SENSELESS

VIOLENCE; HE WOULD NO LONGER TOLERATE THE DISORDERS. HE THEN ADMITTED HIS OWN PERPLEXITY CONCERNING THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE PERSONS STIMULATING THE VIOLENCE; OF COURSE THE DEMONSTRATIONS AND HATRED WERE DIRECTED AGAINST HIM (AND THE U.S. WAS A TARGET, TOO), BUT HE SAID HE WAS UNCLEAR WHAT ELSE THEY WANTED. HE COMPARED THE PROGRESS THAT IRAN HAS MADE AT ALMOST EVERY LEVEL OF THE SOCIETY IN THE LAST TWO DECADES AND REELED OFF A NUMBER OF STEPS TAKEN TO BETTER THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE: FREE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, PARTICIPATION IN FACTORY OWNERSHIP BY THE WORKERS, SUBSIDIZED PRICES ON FOOD NECESSITIES, LAND OWNERSHIP, ETC. HE SAID THAT INFLATION AND RISING EXPECTATIONS CAUSED UNDERSTANDABLE DISSATISFACTION, BUT HE EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE THAT THE RATE OF INFLATION HAD FALLEN FROM ITS PREVIOUS HIGH LEVEL TO JUST SLIGHTLY UNDER EIGHT PERCENT.

3. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION THAT SHAH STATED THAT HE BELIEVED ONLY A MINORITY OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WERE INVOLVED IN THE DISORDERS. HE WAS CERTAIN, HE SAID, THAT THE TUDEH PARTY AND OTHER OUTSIDE FORCES WERE COMBINING WITH KHOMEINI TO CREATE THE PROBLEMS. IN HIS VIEW THE KGB WAS VERY ACTIVE IN THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THE EXTREMISTS WERE ABLE BY THEIR THREATS AND HARASSMENT TO CREATE A SENSE OF FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY AMONG THE MAJORITY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO THEN REMAIN
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SILENT OR AT WORST GO ALONG WITH THE EXTREMISTS FOR SELF PROTECTION. (COMMENT: EMBASSY HAS CONFIRMED THIS ITSELF FROM SEVERAL REGIGIOUS SOURCES.)

4. WHEN I NOTED THAT HIS CONSTITUTION DAY SPEECH HAD BEEN RECEIVED VERY POSITIVELY IN WASHINGTON, THE SHAH COMMENTED, ZYES," AND, SMILING RUEFULLY, "TWO DAYS LATER WE HAVE THE ISFAHAN PROBLEMS*" HE MUSED WHETHER IN FACT THERE WAS NOT SOME CONNECTION BETWEEN HIS SPEECH AND THE RIOTS, AND CONJECTURED THAT THE EXTREMISTS AND PROVOCATEURS DO NOT WISH THE LIBERALIZATION PROCESS TO WORK.

5. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION, GENERAL AZHARI(CHIEF, SUPREME COMMANDER'S STAFF) TOLD ME THAT QUIET HAD GENERALLY RETURNED TO ISFAHAN UPON THE ENTRY OF THE ARMY. HE THOUGHT THAT THIS WAS DUE NOT ONLY TO THE OVERWHELMING DISPLAY OF FORCE, BUT ALSO TO THE GENERAL RESPECT THE POPULACE STILL HAS FOR THE MILITARY -- COMPARED TO THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE POLICE.
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